

We claim:

1. A multimedia distribution system comprising:
 - (a) a communications switch;
 - (b) at least one network interface device connected to the communications switch;
 - (c) a first workstation connected to the switch;
 - (d) a data server connected to the switch;
 - (e) a first codec connected to the switch; and
2. The multimedia distribution system of claim 1 further comprising a second video workstation; a second codec connected to the second video workstation; and wherein the second workstation communicates with the first workstation via a communications network.
3. The multimedia distribution system of claim 2 wherein the communications network is selected from the group comprising ISDN, Ethernet, Token Ring, ATM, IP, Wireless, Telephone or T1.
4. A remote virtual access system comprising:
 - (a) a multifunctional bidirectional communications switch;
 - (b) at least one decoder connected to the switch;
 - (c) a data server connected to the switch;
 - (d) a first video workstation connected to the communications switch;
 - (e) at least one multiview device connected to the communications switch;and

(f) at least one image transmitting device connected to the communications switch;

5. The remote virtual access system of claim 4 wherein the first video workstation communicates with the communications switch via a network interface device.

5 6. The remote virtual access system of claim 4 wherein the image transmitting device communicates with the switch via a communications network.

7. The remote virtual access system of claim 6 wherein the communications network is selected from the group network is selected from the group comprising ISDN, Ethernet, Token Ring, ATM, IP, Wireless, Telephone or T1.

10 8. The remote virtual access system of claim 4 further comprising a second workstation and wherein the second workstation communicates with the first workstation or the image transmitting device or the communications switch via a communications network.

15 9. A multimedia information access service comprising:
a first system comprising:

- (a) a first communications switch;
- (b) a first workstation connection to the communications switch;
- (c) a data server connected to the first communications switch;

a second system comprising:

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- (a) a second communications switch;
 - (b) a device for transmitting signals to the communications switch;
 - (c) a device for converting signals, the device in communication with the transmitting device; and

(d) at least one network interface device wherein the network interface device transmits signals from the first system to the second system.

10. The multimedia information access service of claim 9 further comprising a LAN switch connected to the data server.

5 11. The multimedia information access service of claim 9 further comprising at least one multiview device connected to the second communications switch.

12. The multimedia information access service of claim 9 further comprising a second transmitter connected to the second communications switch.

13. The multimedia information access service of claim 9 wherein the second transmitter receives data from a remote image transmitting device.

14. The multimedia information access of claim 13 wherein the first workstation is adapted to communicate with the image transmitting device.

15. The multimedia information access service of claim 11 wherein the multiview device is adapted to transmit multiple images to the first workstation.

16. The multimedia information access service of claim 13 wherein the second transmitter is adapted to transmit data to the remote image transmitting device.

17. A method of distributing information comprising the steps of:

- (a) transmitting video signals from an image transmitting device;
- (b) sending the video signals over a communications network to a decoder;
- (c) converting the video signals at the decoder;
- (d) transmitting the converted video signals to a workstation via a communication switch;
- (e) displaying the video signals at the workstation; and

(f) transmitting the video signals to a second workstation via the communications network.

18. A method of distributing real-time multimedia information comprising the steps of:

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- (a) receiving compressed digital video data signals;
 - (b) decompressing the video data signals;
 - (c) converting the video data signals from digital to analog;
 - (d) transmitting the video data signals to a first communications switch via a network interface;
 - 10 (e) receiving the video data signals at a second network interface;
 - (f) transmitting the video data signals to a workstation; and
 - (g) displaying the video data signals at the workstation.

19. The method of claim 18 further comprising the steps of:

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- (h) manipulating the video data signals at the workstation;
 - (i) transmitting the manipulated video data signals to an image transmitting device.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the manipulated video data signals are adapted to control the image transmitting device.